



BUILD YOUR SKILLS

GARDENING BASICS

Gardens come in all shapes and sizes. Whether you are a keen gardener or just like to potter around, a garden should be an extension to your home, an area to be enjoyed. Somewhere to relax, play or entertain but most of all, it should be unique to you.

To a first time gardener this can all seem a little daunting but it needn't be. This leaflet is a short introduction to the tools, plants

and techniques that you will need to help you be successful, and even 'green fingered'.

If this is your first garden, keep it simple. As you gain in confidence, add to and develop your garden.

Start by using pre-grown plants, and maybe, experiment growing seeds or cuttings. There are lots of books available on the subject.

You may wish to add the "hard" elements to your garden - paving, walling patios, decking, sheds and summerhouses. You will also need tools for constructing and maintaining your garden, combined with a wide range of pots, containers, fertilisers, weed killers and growing media – available from all Wickes stores.

BASIC TOOLS

Forks and Spades

Our spades and forks have solid forged heads manufactured from one piece of steel, which are hardened and tempered, lessening the possibility of spade heads snapping or fork prongs breaking. There are two types of steel used, carbon steel and stainless steel. Stainless steel, as the name suggests, will not tarnish or rust and will be less likely to "clog" in heavy soils.

Border Forks and Spades

These are smaller versions of the above tools and as the names suggests are used in borders or areas where a larger tool will cause damage to surrounding plants.

Rakes

There are two basic types of rake, one with ridged prongs used for breaking down soil prior to planting and the other with flexible wire prongs used for raking up leaves or raking out moss and dead grass from lawns.

Dutch Hoe

Used for weeding and breaking up hard soil between plants. Young weeds are chopped off slightly below the surface and in many cases will not grow again. Weeds like dandelions require the complete removal of the roots or they will grow again. Always take particular care when hoeing as it is remarkably easy to chop off the plants you want to keep.

Lawn Edger

This is use to create a clean edge between a lawn and a border. You may be tempted to use a spade, but the blades of these are curved and you will never get a clean straight line. By using an edger along with a stringline or long plank straight edges can dramatically improve to look of a garden. Use the cut turf for composting.

Hand Trowels and Weeding Forks

Trowels are used for digging out small holes for planting. Forks are used for weeding small areas.

Border Shears

Use for maintaining the grass edges between lawns and borders

Hedging Shears

These are used for clipping hedges and normally come with standard 'short' handles. Some are supplied with telescopic handles to reach further.

Secateurs and loppers

Used for general pruning or cutting back woody shrubs. There are two types, 'anvil pattern' which gives a clean cut and tends to be used on dry, thicker or woody stems.

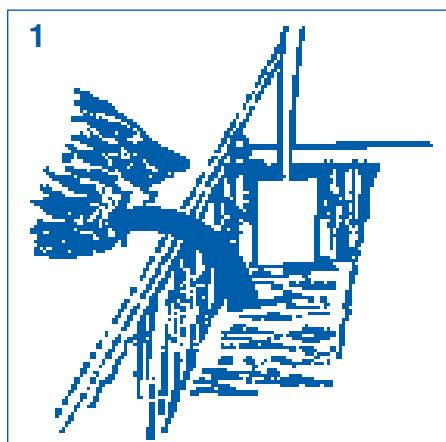
'Bypass', which are better for wet spring wood and softer stems to obtain a diagonal cut. Do not try and cut through branches that are thicker than these have been designed to cut as you will end up damaging the tools. Always use the correct tool for the job.

Pruning and Bow Saws

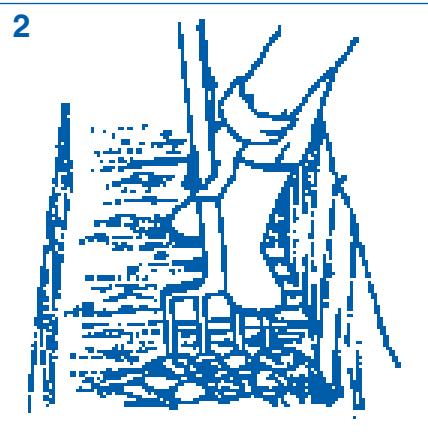
These saws are used for cutting more substantial branches. Beware of the teeth as they are extremely sharp.

Soil Preparation

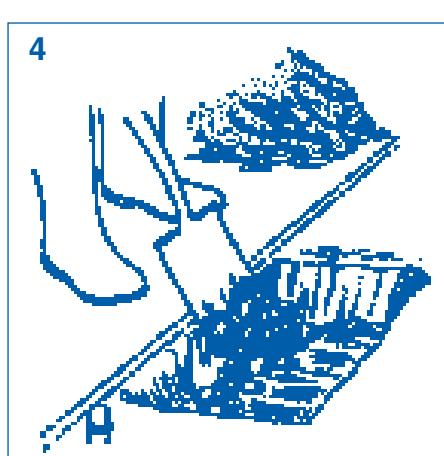
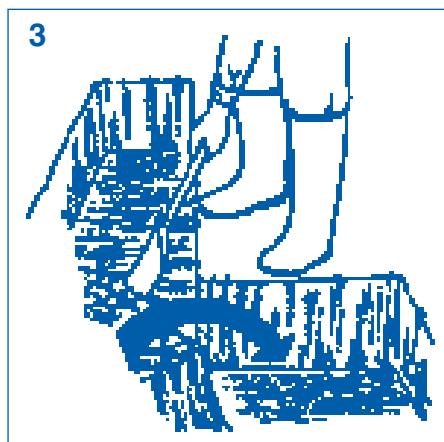
At first sight your garden soil would appear to be solid and robust, but is in fact a fragile living environment which must be protected and wherever possible, improved.



If you have purchased a new property, the worst situation is after the builders have left and where the soil has been moved, mixed or worst of all, compacted. The best types of soil will normally be the dark fertile top soil (loam). Before builders start work this soil should have been scraped off, then replaced when the job was finished.



Compaction is a problem that must be addressed to ensure that there is no "pan" or layer of compacted soil. This prevents water draining and plant roots from forming properly.



Double Digging

Double digging will take care of most of these problems and thankfully should only have to be carried out once, as it is very hard, but worthwhile, work. Digging to a depth of 450mm (18"), adding well-rotted farmyard manure, mushroom compost or other organic material, will improve the soil by retaining moisture and providing food.

1. Dig a trench one spade deep and 600mm (2') wide. Store the soil to fill in the final trench. **Diagram 1**
2. Fork over the base of the trench,

adding compost or manure. **Diagram 2**

3. Dig and throw forward the next 600mm, mixing in organic material and creating the next trench. **Diagram 3**

4. Repeat until the entire plot has been dug, then fill in the last trench with the soil from the first. **Diagram 4**

Hints and Tips

- Never attempt to prepare the soil when very wet or frozen
- Always attempt to keep the fertile top-soil on the top and the sub-soil below
- Add good quantities of organic matter
- Dig deeper if 'pans' are suspected
- When possible, prepare in the autumn to leaving the winter weather to break down the soil surface
- Always work off a board to prevent compaction, especially on clay soils

Weeds and grass cover

Weeds, in particular perennial types, should be removed during digging. In extreme circumstances use a weed killer, following the instructions on the container.

Acidity and Alkalinity

There is a variety of plants that will only tolerate an acid soil and therefore, before planting, it is important to test the amount of acidity present and plant accordingly.

This can be carried out with a pH soil testing kit.

Garden Design

In this short leaflet it is not possible to give details on garden design. There are many books on the subject, from which you can take inspiration. Public gardens, in your area, are also a good source of inspiration. These are likely to show you possible plants to use and how best to display them.

You will also need to bear in mind the conditions of your own garden. If it is very shady then you can choose shade loving plants. If you look hard enough, there are plants to suit all conditions.

If you are designing your own garden you can also include "hard landscaping" such as timber decking, paving and walling - see our Outdoor Projects Brochure for more details or Good Ideal Leaflets on Decking and Paving.

Sowing Seeds

As with so many jobs, the key to this is in the preparation. The soil should be dug to a depth of 230mm (9"). This can be carried out in the Autumn, Winter or just before sowing in the Spring – but earlier is better. Rake the surface to break down the soil.

Unfortunately, it is never possible to eliminate all weeds during preparation and new weeds will always grow alongside seedlings. If you sow in rows, weeds can be easily identified and removed.

All seed packets give details on how best to germinate the seeds, some will require soaking prior to planting and others will need particular temperature ranges to allow germination to take place. The instructions will also give advice on further cultivation required and the best location for specific planting.



Bedding Plants

These can provide colour all year round by replacing summer flowering plants with those that flower in the autumn and winter. These are ideal for planting on their own or with most other plants in the borders. They can also be planted in hanging baskets, pots and tubs.

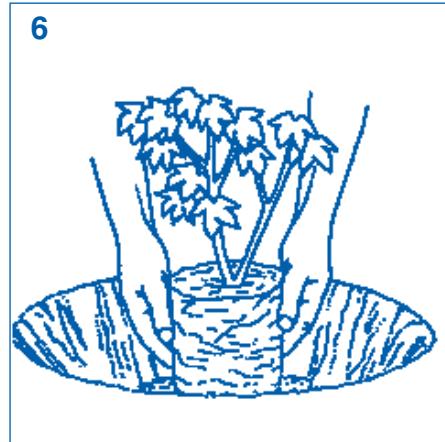
Planting

If planting in containers, make sure you have good drainage and use good quality multi-purpose compost. For borders, fork over to a depth of around 300mm (12"), forking in organic matter or a fertiliser as you go.

Water plants well before planting. Place plants where you think you would like them whilst they are still in their pots, taking into account how wide they will spread, how high they will grow and their colour when in flower.

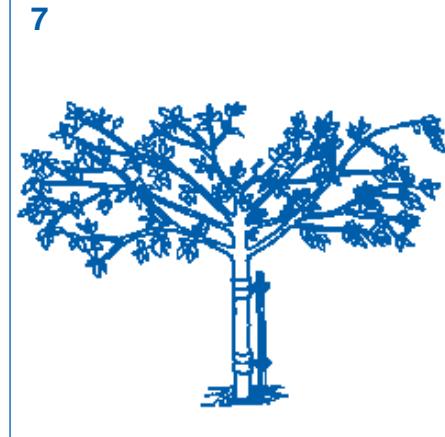
Dig holes for the plants with a hand trowel so that the plant will be just

below the depth they were grown in their original container. Take care when removing your plants from their trays or pots so as not to damage the roots or shoots. Water them in thoroughly.



Shrubs

These can offer height or ground cover, scent, flowers, attractive foliage and some have attractive stem during the winter months. They can be planted at any time as long as the soil is not too dry, too wet or frozen. However, the best time to plant is from September to early December and from February to late June.



Planting

Using a spade or fork, dig a hole large enough to take the roots and to allow for additional growth. Remember to take into account how tall and wide the plant will grow when positioning the hole. Fork in organic matter to the base of the hole and into the soil you have removed. **Diagrams 5 & 6.**

Water the plant well before removing from the container and place it in the hole. If the roots are tightly formed, gently tease them out to encourage new growth. Replace the soil and gently firm around the plant, water thoroughly. Never allow the plant to dry out - you should water frequently for

the first three to four weeks.

Some larger plants may require additional support whilst the roots spread out - use canes or stakes depending on the size of plant.
Diagram 7

Conifers

These can offer structure to a garden and come in both fast and slow growing varieties. Height and spread can vary so ensure that this is taking into consideration when planting. They are very good for creating hedges.

Planting

Preparation is similar to shrubs but the hole is normally around one metre across and 230mm (9") deep, again organic matter is mixed into the soil before refilling and watering in is very important.

If growing conifers in containers, slow growing or dwarf varieties are best but ensure that they never dry out and use the largest container you can.

Spring Flowering Bulbs

These are wonderful plants to show the passing of winter and the arrival of spring and they are one of the easiest to plant and maintain.

Planting

This should be done in late summer and the autumn. As a general rule the planting depth is two times the height of the bulb taking care to ensure that the bulb is the right way up. Planting can be in borders, the lawn or in containers. Remember, if you do plant in the lawn, you are likely to have an unsightly area while the leaves die back. Do not be tempted to cut off the leaves early as these die back into the bulb for food for the following year.

In containers, use good quality multi-purpose compost. You have the opportunity to plant at varying depths to prolong the flowering period of the tub. Daffodils are planted at the lowest level, the next layer could be Tulips and the top surface layer could be Polyanthus or Primroses with Crocuses.

Remember to "dead head" the flowers, unless you want to encourage self-seeding. When all the flowers have died, remove any winter bedding plants along with the Crocuses. Take out the top layer of compost, replace with new and plant summer bedding plants.

When these have finished the compost

and plants should be removed so the cycle can begin again. To help encourage re-growth a liquid fertiliser should be applied after flowering.

Creating a new Lawn

Preparation should be started several weeks before sowing takes place. This is the key to a successful lawn. Remove all weeds, stones and other debris.

Dig the top 230mm (9") of soil, rake the surface and tread or roll it to produce a level surface. If possible leave the soil to settle for 2 to 3 weeks, remove any new weeds that appear. Five days before sowing rake in a general purpose fertilizer.

The best time to sow is from March to

the beginning of October. Avoid sowing during frost. Germination may be seen after 5 days in ideal conditions, but allow around 10 to 14 days. Divide the area into squares. 1 metre or yard squares are ideal, using canes or string. Sow at a rate of 35g per square metre (1oz per square yard). Always shake the seed pack well before use to ensure the seeds are well mixed. Sow half the seed from left to right and the rest from top to bottom to ensure even coverage. Lightly rake the seed into the soil.

After sowing ensure the soil surface is moist at all times. If the weather is dry, water with a fine spray. Avoid washing the soil away by over watering. Weeds may grow through but these can be treated after 6 months with a selective

weed killer. Your new lawn can be cut when it reaches a height of 75mm (3"). Only give it a light trim at first gradually lowering the cut height with subsequent cuts to an ideal height of 25mm (1").

Note: Always use a sharp blade on your Lawn Mower

GLOSSARY

Alpine – small plants often found growing in mountainous area, used in rock gardens.

Annual – a seed grown plant that flowers and dies in one growing season.

Bulb – under ground stem that stores food sending roots down and leaves/flower up.

Biennial – plants that flower in the second year of growing.

Multi Purpose Compost – a mixture of rotted organic matter used as a fertiliser, can also be a mixture of peat and organic matter used for growing seedlings or for potting.

Conifer – an evergreen cone bearing tree.

Dead Heading – removing old flowers from plants

Deciduous – a tree/or plant that loses its leaves at the end of the growing season.

Drill – a shallow groove use for planting seeds in a line

Ericaceous – collective name for heathers

Evergreen – a tree that loses its leaves throughout the year rather than at one time.

Friable – light crumbly soil.

Germination – first signs of growth from a seed.

Hardy – plants able to withstand almost all weather. Half hardy – plants that need some protection from frosts.

Herbaceous – a non-woody stemmed plant that dies away at the end of the growing season

Mulch – a topping of bark, compost or bulky organic material used to retain moisture and control weeds.

Pan – a compacted layer of soil that prevents drainage and aeration.

Pricking out – transferring seedlings to larger containers to allow further strong growth

Perennial – a herbaceous plant that flowers annually for at least two years.

Pruning – removal of unwanted stems/branches to encourage new growth.

Shrub – a woody plant with no trunk.

Spit – a measurement the depth of a spade (300mm or 1 foot).

Sub-soil – soil below topsoil that is not normally fertile.

Tilth – soil broken down by raking.

Thinning – taking out seedling/plants to allow further growth of the remaining plants.

Top Soil – the fertile layer of soil.

Variegated – leaves or petals with two or more colours.



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